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Online Hate & Harrassment Targeting Public Figures and Influencers on Instagram in Jordan

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Content warning: This report contains mentions and examples of hateful content which some readers may find distressing.

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Executive summary

This research examines harmful online discourse targeting Jordanian influencers and public figures on Instagram over a 12-month period. Online harms, for the purposes of this study, are defined as comments likely to inflict physical, emotional, psychological, social or economic harm; incite hostility or discrimination; facilitate illegal or dangerous behaviour; or undermine the safety, dignity, or rights of individuals or communities. The findings reveal that online harms in Jordan are widespread, highly gendered and deeply embedded within prevailing social, cultural and moral norms.

Social media platforms are central [arenas](#) for public debate and cultural expression in Jordan. Among the most prominent accounts in these spaces are (online) influencers as well as (offline) public figures. However, their visibility and perceived influence make them particularly vulnerable to online harassment, abuse and hate speech, which is facilitated by platform features including [pseudonymity](#) and [algorithmic](#) amplification. Previous [studies on hate speech](#) have shown how social platforms can enable personal attacks that target individuals based on visibility and social identity.

In line with ISD's [previous research](#), **we found that the majority of hate speech,¹ harassment, and online bullying on Jordanian Instagram was directed at women.** This type of content also included explicit verbal abuse such as swears, slurs, derogatory labelling and other forms of demeaning or belittling language. Women public figures and influencers are more likely than men to be subjected to sexualised abuse, body-focused ridicule and accusations of

exploiting their physical appearance for attention or fame.

By contrast, men are more frequently targeted through insults questioning their masculinity, authority, or competence, often expressed through humour, sarcasm or indirect language. Individuals who do not conform to dominant gender norms face heightened abuse across both categories.

At its most severe, abuse includes explicit calls for death, encouragement of suicide, and invocations of honour-based violence, underscoring the real-world risks associated with gendered online hostility.

Religious and moral harassment emerges as a particularly prominent pattern, frequently involving coordinated or repetitive comments invoking divine punishment, questioning faith or enforcing narrow standards of respectability. Such discourse reflects broader cultural norms governing gender, morality and public behaviour and illustrates how online spaces can reproduce and intensify offline hierarchies and social controls.

Our findings demonstrate that [online abuse](#) against influencers and public figures in Jordan is systematic rather than episodic, normalising hostility and exclusion within digital public spheres. This discovery poses significant challenges for platform governance, content moderation and the protection of women and marginalised groups in online public life.

¹ ISD classifies hate speech as any activity or content which seeks to dehumanise, demonise, harass, threaten or incite violence against an individual or community on

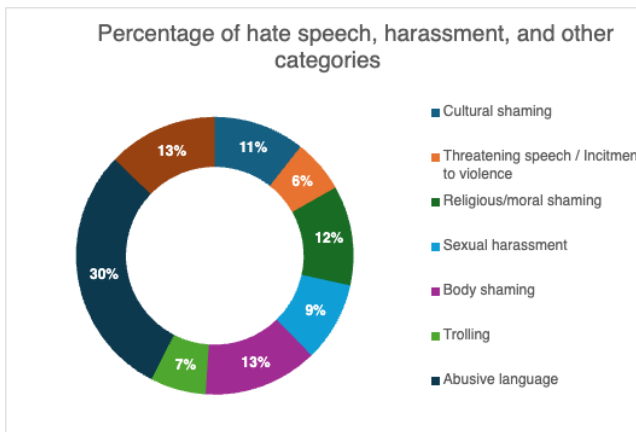
the basis of their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, sex, disability, migrant status or religion.

Key findings

- **Women influencers and public figures were targets of hate, harassment and abusive language online at a much higher rate than men.** An analysis of almost 14,000 comments shows that most content that qualifies as hate speech, harassment and abusive was strongly gendered; the majority of targets (72 percent) were women (alongside marginalised groups), while 28 percent were men. Cases of sexual harassment, body shaming and harassment linked to religion or morality were overwhelmingly targeted at women.
 - **Influencers and public figures are inundated with harassment and abusive language at a much higher rate than overt hate speech.** Of all comments that qualified as hate speech or harassment and abusive language, 6 percent were classified as hate speech, while 94 percent contained harassment and abusive language (graph 1).
 - **Calls for death or self-harm dominated the content classified as hate speech.** These 6 percent of comments often included wishes for death, encouragement to commit suicide or invocations that God “takes one’s life” or “strikes them down”. While the 94 percent included abusive content, discriminatory speech, sexual harassment, religious and moral harassment and trolling.
 - **Influencers and public figures are routinely insulted online.** The most dominant category of content was abusive language, account for nearly 30 percent of comments, including verbal abuse (such as curses and derogatory labelling).
- The other categories included:
- **Influencers and public figures were harassed for their silence in relation to the war on Gaza.** Thirteen percent of comments contained discriminatory language, often employing harmful expressions to frame Jordanian-Palestinians as foreigners.
 - **Women were by far the most likely to be shamed for their appearance online.** Thirteen percent also involved body shaming, targeting individuals’ appearance, body size and shape. Nearly a quarter of these comments focus on women's weight.
 - **Influencers and public figures face religious shaming online.** Eleven percent of comments were classified as religious and moral harassment. These comments stem out of perceived violations of moral norms.
 - **Women influencers and public figures are much more likely to be sexually harassed online as compared to men.** Nine percent of all collected comments constituted sexual harassment, with such content exclusively targeting women. These comments included sexual slurs, references to

prostitution, critiques of revealing clothing and repeated objectifying references to specific body parts.

- **Influencers and public figures voicing support for the Palestinian cause online resulted in trolling.** Six percent of all collected comments were classified as trolling, inflammatory or off-topic remarks intended to provoke or cause distress. This behaviour was particularly prevalent in discussions related to the Palestinian cause.



Graph 1: The percentage of comments collected that qualify as hate speech (threatening language).

Glossary

Hate speech: ISD classifies hate speech as any activity or content which seeks to dehumanise, demonise, harass, threaten or incite violence against an individual or community on the basis of their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, sex, disability, migrant status or religion.

Harassment: Harassment targeting a specific individual or group with the intent to threaten, provoke or cause distress

Harmful online content: is content that encompasses any text, image, video, audio, or interactive material disseminated via digital platforms that is likely to inflict physical, emotional, psychological, social, or economic harm; incite hostility or discrimination; facilitate illegal or dangerous behaviour; or undermine the safety, dignity, or rights of individuals or communities.

Moral shaming: When individuals/communities shame a target based on social norms, cultural expectations or communal codes of conduct, rather than formal religious doctrine. It is tied to social ethics – what the community views as respectable, appropriate or honourable. Moral shaming is related to *urf* العرف or *aib* العيب.

Religious/moral shaming: Public acts of humiliation, ridicules and condemnation directed at individuals based on perceived religious shortcomings.

Sexual harassment: Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or nonverbal conduct of a sexual nature.

Body shaming: The act of making negative, mocking or critical remarks about a person's physical appearance, size or shape.

Trolling: Posting inflammatory or off-topic comments in an online environment to provoke and cause distress.

Discriminatory speech: Speech that discriminates against individuals based on personal characteristics that can lead to marginalisation and exclusion.

Influencer: Individuals who leverage a sustained online presence and audience engagement on digital platforms to shape opinions, attitudes or behaviours, often within specific social, cultural or commercial domains.

Public figures: Public figures are individuals with a professional role or sustained presence in public discourse, have attained a level of visibility that subjects them to public attention, commentary and scrutiny beyond that of private individuals.

Methodology

We chose to focus on Instagram as it is a primary platform for influencer culture in [Jordan and globally](#). The data collection process combined manual monitoring Instagram comment sections and collection using digital tools. **digital tools.**

First, a group of public figures and influencers consisting of content creators, actors, artists, food bloggers, media figures, journalists and social/political activists was manually identified. A total of 40 accounts were selected based on their visibility, such as their follower base and post engagement within the last year. After identifying the posts with the highest engagement for each selected account, analysts reviewed and analysed the first 200 comments chronologically, on each post.

Analysts used [Bright Data](#) to support the identification and aggregation of similar comment patterns. Bright Data is a platform that enables the automated collection of publicly available online data in a structured and ethical manner. Specific accounts, keywords and comment examples identified during manual analysis were used as reference points within Bright Data. These points allowed analysts to collect comparable content across a wider set of posts and profiles and identify recurring themes and language patterns. The analysis focused on identifying and categorising online harms. Comments were coded manually based on their dominant characteristics. Particular attention was paid to language, tone, repetition and target selection. Where relevant, researchers noted overlap between categories especially where harassment intersected with moral shaming or cultural judgment.

Hate speech towards influencers and public figures in Jordan

Gender continues to emerge as one of the most significant fault lines in harmful online discourse. Analysts found women in Jordan face most of the hate speech online as compared to men during the research period. Six percent of the total comments collected during the research period were classified as hate speech, containing threatening language or incitement to violence based on gender. Of these comments, 80 percent were directed at women and 20 percent at men. Although six percent of total comments is a relatively small number, we have highlighted this content due to its severity: previous ISD research has shown how gendered hate speech can have serious implications for women in [the public sphere](#).

In one notable case, an actress was repeatedly subjected to such rhetoric because of her role in a popular Jordanian television series, where her character was the victim of an honour killing by her brother. Commentators explicitly wished that the actress suffered a similar fate because of posts she had made on her Instagram profile they felt were revealing and did not conform to Jordanian cultural norms (Figures 8 to 11). Comments containing threatening language or incitement to violence frequently included wishes for death (Figures 1 to 3), encouragement to commit suicide (Figures 4 and 5) or invocations that God strike down a specific woman influencer or public figure (Figures 6 and 7).



Figure 1: "I pray to God you die".



Figure 2: "Isn't there a missile that can hit Al-waibdeh?? [An area in Amman where the video -featuring the targeted individual- was filmed".



Figure 3: "If God is willing, an F-16 missile will hit you and rid us of people like you".



Figure 4: "Go kill yourself".



Figure 5: "If I faced as much backlash as you do, I would commit suicide".



Figure 6: "May God smite you down".

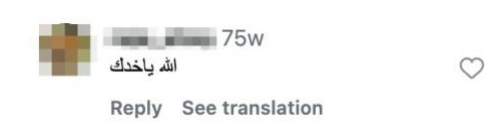


Figure 7: "May God take you".



Figure 8: "Wish he would kill you rid us of you".



— View all 49 replies

Figure 9: "Now I understand why her brother shot her in season 1".



Figure 10 "Her brother was right to shoot her". The reply: "It is his right because his sister is shameful".

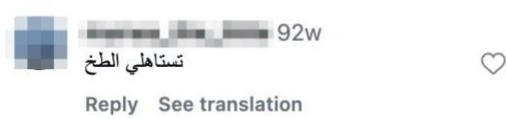


Figure 11: "You deserve to be shot".

In another case, users threatened a woman influencer with physical violence in response to her imitation of a popular video that satirised low-wage employment and employers. This included users stating that they would strike, cut, or execute her if they were able to reach her (Figures 12 to 14).



Figure 12: "If I had one, I'd grab a nail [spike] and cut her".



Figure 13: "It's my fault for not killing you".



Figure 14: "you are sentenced to execution".

Abusive language

The single largest category of comments (29 percent) contained derogatory language; of this category, 61 percent of comments were directed at women. This content predominantly consisted of explicit verbal abuse such as curses, derogatory labelling and other forms of demeaning or belittling language. By contrast, derogatory comments targeting men were typically indirect in nature, frequently framed through humour or sarcasm rather than overt hostility (Figure 15 and 16).

Although derogatory language does not reach ISD's definition of hate speech, it qualifies as [harassment](#) when it is targeted, repeated or

intended to intimidate, humiliate or distress an individual.



Figure 15: “your beard is like a camel’s underarm hair”.



Figure 16: “Leave me alone, shame on your mother, you are disgusting”.

ISD researchers found a range of personal insults and verbal harassment directed at influencers include terms such as “wh*re”, “re**rd” or “piece of s**t”. In other cases, users resorted to using emojis, various characters, as well as a mix of Arabic and English letters to complete insults such as the examples below (Figures 17 to 19).



Figure 17: [a highly offensive sexualised insult involving a target’s mother. The word cannot be translated literally, as a word-for-word rendering is graphic and inappropriate].



Figure 18: “you are a sl*t with a psychological illness”.

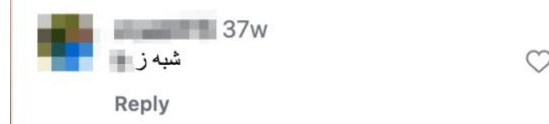


Figure 19: “you look like a d*ck”.

In one instance, a user employed ableist derogatory language, referring to two women as “the re**rds of social media.” This characterisation was reinforced by other users who described the women as “deranged” and “unhinged”, illustrating how disability-related slurs are used alongside broader patterns of online harassment and derogatory language (Figure 20).



Figure 20: The retards of social media”.

Discriminatory speech

ISD’s investigation reveals a national fissure line that appears to be connected to the war in Gaza. Thirteen percent of comments contained discriminatory language based on race, ethnicity or national origin. There was a particular emphasis on tensions between Jordanians and Palestinians, including Jordanians of Palestinian origin.

Exclusionary rhetoric frequently employed terms such as “baljik”, “baljak” and “balajkeh”, which are derogatory expressions used to frame Jordanian-Palestinians as foreigners (Figure 21). When an influencer’s post was perceived as shameful or controversial, some users questioned their identity. For example, these comments asserted that the individual was baljik, or stated that they would give up their own Jordanian citizenship in protest (Figures 22 and 23).



Figure 21: "He's a digesting Palestinian baljik refugee who is running Jordanians' reputation".



Figure 22: "I want to give you my citizenship and become Indian. That's better than having to see/deal with you".

In other cases, discriminatory comments targeted influencers on the basis of their race or skin colour. Users labelled dark-skinned Jordanians as "Indian" or "Bengali", reinforcing racialised assumptions and exclusionary notions of national belonging (Figure 23).



Figure 23: "Is she Indian or Bangali [referring to a dark-skinned Jordanian]".

Sexual harassment

Women were also consistently subjected to sexual harassment due to their roles as public figures and influencers. Nine percent of all comments involve sexual harassment, exclusively targeting women. These comments frequently relied on misogynistic insults, sexual slurs, references to prostitution, revealing clothing or repeated references to specific body parts (Figure 24). In several cases, users implied influencers or public figures were involved in pornographic or sexually exploitative activities or encouraged them to take part. (Figures 25 and 26).



Figure 24: "I've always wanted to see your thighs".



Figure 25: "This is the content of a sl**, what did you expect!".



Figure 26: "It would be best if you start filming po*n,"

Sexual harassment often included framing targets' outfits as evidence of moral failure or sexual availability (Figures 27 and 28) to justify sexualised remarks or public shaming.



Figure 27: "How much for the wh***".

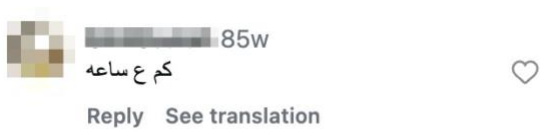


Figure 28: "How much for the hour".

Women were frequently portrayed as deliberately leveraging their bodies or physical appearance to achieve visibility or fame (Figure 29), rather than having their own professional value (Figure 30). One comment alleged that the individual had "lost relevance and resorted to the quickest solution", implying a conscious reliance on physical appearance in lieu of substantive content creation (Figure 31).



Figure 29: "Go onto Only Fan so we can see your a**".



Figure 30: "I hope you stop existing... your body is the only thing that made you famous".



Figure 31: "She must have felt that her popularity is dropping a little, so she resorted to the quickest solution"

This type of language was often used to harass or discredit targets particularly when the content they produced was perceived as controversial or inappropriate.

Body-shaming

Women's bodies were often the subject of abuse online. Thirteen percent of comments involved body shaming comments which degraded targets' appearance including body image, size and shape (Figure 32); Ninety-three percent of these comments were directed at women. Nearly a quarter of body-shaming comments focused specifically on weight: individuals perceived as too thin were labelled with derogatory terms such as "lizard" (سحلية) (Figures 33 and 34), while those perceived as overweight were targeted with remarks such as "cow" "ghoul", or told to go to the gym or see a dietitian (Figures 35 to 37). In some cases, users reinforced these insults by posting GIFs of animals.



Figure 32: "What is this a**.. An a** of a tank"



Figure 33: "A rare red lizard".



Figure 34: "Who is this cow".



Figure 35: "Sadly you need a dietitian".



Figure 36: "Oh my God, for the time in my life I see a cow talking".



Figure 37: "ghoul".

A separate set of body-shaming comments targeted facial features and body proportions. Examples included mocking the size of an influencer's head or claiming that facial features did not match the body (Figure 38).



Figure 38: “She has the face of an old man on the body of a girl”.

Religious and moral harassment

Women were much more likely to face religious shaming for being online as compared to men. Analysis indicates that 11 percent of all collected data falls under religious and moral harassment. Of these, 85 percent of the comments were targeted at women influencers and public figures. ISD distinguished between religious/moral-based harassment and cultural shaming/harassment based on the following characteristics:

- Anchored in religious doctrine or tradition, such as mentions of divine judgment, Quran, Hadeeth (the prophet Mohammad’s sayings), etc.
- Reinforces in-group/out-group boundaries e.g. “she is Muslim and thus should wear the Hijab” versus other comments that justify an influencer’s behaviour e.g. a post claiming “It’s ok, she’s Christian”.

Our analysis found that Jordanian influencers (especially women) suffered religious and/or moral shaming when they are perceived as failing to conform to societal expectations. Systematic harassment is defined by ISD repeated aggressive comments by multiple or the same user (Figures 39 and 40), as seen in the examples below.



Figure 39: “What’s the use of this nonsense. You’re firewood in hell”.



Figure 40: “I swear to God you’re disgraceful. Fuel for hell”.

Both Muslim and Christian female influencers and public figures were often shamed in religious terms, especially when perceived to have worn immodest attire (Figures 41 and 42).



Figure 41: “Is nudity permitted in the Christian religion”.



Figure 42: “As if you’re Muslim. Wait for God’s punishment”

Even veiled influencers face backlash for not adhering to the socially perceived approved ‘hijab’ (veil) norms in Jordan.



Figure 43: “undress, your almost non-existent hijab is [hateful slur]”.



Figure 44: “This isnt hijab, it’s prostitution”.

As with other forms of hate speech and harassment, 85 percent of the dataset targeted women. On the other hand, 15 percent targeted men. In these cases, the comments condemned their content they considered

immoral, or in a minority of cases, for not conforming to gender norms (Figure 45).



Figure 45: "لعن الله المتشبهين بالنساء" "God will curse men who imitate/resemble women".

Cultural shaming and harassment

Social mores appeared to be influencing harassment or shaming online, as 10 percent of all collected comments revolved around cultural shaming and harassment. This category was considered distinct from religious shaming and harassment, as it covered harmful content referencing socially constructed notions of what is considered "normal" or "acceptable" within Jordanian society, rather than appeals to divine authority.

In this form, shaming was frequently articulated through moral binaries such as right versus wrong, harm versus no harm and justice versus injustice. Comments falling explicitly within this category often employed the term *ayb* (عيب) or implied it through shaming influencers for not adhering to traditional patriarchal societal norms. While no single English equivalent fully captures the meaning of *ayb*, the term carries significant moral, social and cultural weight and is best understood as a culture-bound moral concept.

As with other forms of harm, the overwhelming majority of these comments (78 percent) were directed at women.



Figure 46: "are there no men to keep you under control".



Figure 47: "Behave yourself, you shameless women".



Figure 48: "Are there no men to control her".

Nineteen percent of total comments targeting men (28 percent) focused on their manhood (Figure 49) and honour (*alsharaf* or *al'ard*). Despite both translating in English as "honour", in Arabic they are closely related but analytically distinct, particularly in sociological, anthropological and gender-focused scholarship. Influencers and public figures were accused of lacking principals, integrity, social standing, and honesty (Figure 50).



Figure 49: "You are the appearance of erectile dysfunction".



Figure 50: "You are the biggest Cuckold".

Trolling

The analysis indicates that 6 percent of all collected comments constitute trolling: inflammatory or off-topic remarks intended to provoke and cause distress. This pattern was particularly evident in discussions related to the Palestinian cause where public figures and influencers received trolling whether or not they explicitly addressed events in Gaza. Sixty-seven percent of trolling comments targeted

women, reflecting the trend seen in other forms of harassment.

In some instances, users condemned individuals for not posting about Gaza, accusing them of being heartless, lacking humanity or certain principles and framing silence as a personal and ethical failure. In other cases, individuals who did reference Palestine were accused of exploiting the cause for attention or fame. Trolls claimed that these influencers and public figures were “trading” in the Palestinian issue, using it as content or seeking sympathy and followers. Comments also questioned the legitimacy of linking cultural expression, entertainment or personal content with Palestine, accusing them of disrespect towards the suffering of people in Gaza.



Figure 51: “You don’t help Palestine, where is your manhood?”



Figure 52: “You aren’t the first, every person who wants to gain fame exploits the Palestinian cause”.



Figure 53: “A dance show in the name of the Palestinian cause”.

These comments shifted discussions away from the original posts toward provocation, moral policing and personal attacks. As a result, public figures and influencers were put in a position in

which both speaking out and remaining silent attracted backlash. This pattern reflects the use of a highly sensitive political issue as a tool for trolling, aimed at polarisation and generating hostile online interactions.

Conclusions

This research effort shows that women are more frequently subjected to sexualised abuse, moral policing and scrutiny of appearance, clothing, and perceived intent. Such patterns mirror offline inequalities and demonstrate how digital spaces reproduce existing power relations rather than offering neutral or equal platforms for expression.

The online harms facing Jordanian public figures and influencers reflect broader social dynamics. Comments on Instagram reproduce cultural norms around morality, respectability, gender roles and public representation. Framing harmful content including hate through the lens of ‘shame’ and honour makes it more socially acceptable and difficult for victims to challenge.

These findings highlight the need for responses that go beyond content moderation alone. Effective interventions must account for cultural context, including how moral language and social norms are mobilised to legitimize abuse. As such, it is important to invest in digital literacy initiatives that address cultural shaming, gendered harassment and collective targeting. They should also support platform policies that recognise coordinated harassment even when individual comments may appear socially acceptable in isolation.

Addressing online harm requires a dual approach: strengthening platform accountability mechanisms while engaging with the social and cultural narratives that shape how harm is expressed, justified and sustained. Without this broader lens, efforts to promote safer online spaces risk addressing symptoms rather than the underlying dynamics that enable digital hostility.

Recommendations

For Instagram, ISD recommends:

- Ensure the consistent implementation and enforcement of platform policies addressing hate speech, including gender-based abuse and harassment in Arabic. Policy application should account for linguistic and contextual complexities such as the use of emojis embedded within abusive terms, Jordanian dialects and the deployment of non-Arabic characters and transliterated Arabic (Arabizi). These considerations should apply both to content reported by users and platforms' proactive moderation efforts.
- Adopt a safety and privacy by design approach grounded in a victim and survivor-centred framework. A gender-sensitive and trauma-informed perspective should be integrated across all stages of the design and deployment of user interfaces and safety tools. In practice, platforms should equip users in Jordan with accessible features that enhance privacy and reduce exposure to harmful content. At the same time, they should ensure that users are clearly

informed about the availability of these tools and how to use them effectively.

- Allocate sufficient resources to the training and refinement of AI-based moderation systems for Arabic-language content, with the aim of achieving levels of accuracy and effectiveness comparable to those attained in other widely spoken languages.
- Finally, AI-driven moderation should be complemented by robust human oversight. This requires dedicated teams with expertise in gender-based hate speech and abuse. They must also have a nuanced understanding of the linguistic, social, and political contexts specific to Jordan to ensure informed and contextually sensitive moderation decisions.

For the Jordanian government, ISD recommends:

- Adopt a comprehensive, whole-of-society approach to addressing online hate speech, technology-facilitated gender-based harm and online harassment and bullying in Jordan. Scaling up digital resilience should include the development and integration of educational programmes that promote tolerance, inclusivity and critical digital engagement across different age groups and social contexts. These efforts should aim to empower users with the skills needed to navigate digital spaces safely, critically and responsibly.
- Strengthen and expand reporting mechanisms for hate speech,

harassment and bullying, ensuring they are accessible, effective and responsive. These systems should be complemented by specialised training for law enforcement and relevant social safety stakeholders that equips them with the tools to provide trauma-informed, victim-centred support to individuals affected by online abuse.

- Ensure a minimum and enforceable level of platform transparency through the establishment of appropriate, standardised regulatory processes. Platforms should be required to publish regular and meaningful transparency reports on content moderation practices and outcomes, as well as the resources in place for moderating Arabic language content and the Jordanian dialect.

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